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MICHIGAN HISTORICAL COMMISSION
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PATRICK SINCLAIR

By WILLIAM L. JENKS

ADVANCE PAGES, PROCEEDINGS OF THE MICHIGAN PIONEER AND HISTORICAL SOCIETY



LANSING, MICHIGAN
WYNKOOP HALLENBECK CRAWFORD CO., STATE PRINTERS
1914

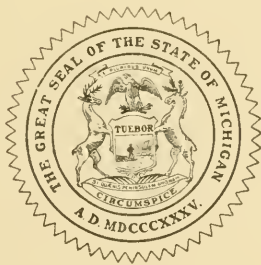


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GENERAL PATRICK SINCLAIR

PATRICK SINCLAIR

BUILDER OF FORT MACKINAC

By far the most conspicuous object in the Island of Mackinac is the old fort which overhangs so protectingly the village below. The thick stone and earth walls, the three old block houses, built, according to the cards upon the doors, in 1780, the old buildings within the enclosure, all force the attention of the visitor, resident or tourist, to the age of the structure, but to few is known even the name, much less anything of the career of its creator.

In the extreme Northeast of Scotland lies the Shire or County of Caithness; a large part of it low and boggy, it rises toward the South and West, and contains but three streams of any size, the Wickwater and the Forss and Thurso Rivers. Most of the coast line is rocky and forbidding and good harbors are few. Near the northeast corner is John O'Groat's house, and south of that along the East Coast is a large bay called Sinclair's Bay. For several centuries the name Sinclair or St. Clair—they are in reality the same, the latter being nearer to the original Norman form—has been the leading one in Caithness; the first earl of Caithness, created in 1455, being Sir William Sinclair.

From this shire, forbidding in its natural aspects, but like so many other places in Scotland, furnishing

an abundant supply of young energetic, capable and courageous men, came the subject of this sketch, of interest to this part of Michigan, not alone because of his connection with Mackinac, but because he was the first man to establish a permanent foothold in the way of occupation, erecting buildings and cultivating land along St. Clair River. This noble river should today bear the name of Sinclair as it did for many years a century ago. The present name is derived from Arthur St. Clair, first Governor of the Northwest territory, the original name passing gradually through forgetfulness of the one and growing importance of the other to its present form. It is a curious fact that both Arthur St. Clair and Patrick Sinclair were born in the same year in the county of Caithness, within twenty-five miles of each other, and they were undoubtedly distantly related.

Whatever the cause,—temperament, roving disposition, hard and forbidding material conditions at home,—certain it is that Scotchmen have proved through centuries the mainstay of British enterprise and glory in foreign lands, and Scotch soldiers and explorers have done much to extend England's domains.

Patrick Sinclair was born in 1736 at Lybster, a small hamlet on the east coast of Caithness about 11 miles southeast of Wick, the chief town of the County, and was the only son and oldest of four children of Alexander who had married a connection in the person of Amelia Sinclair, the daughter of another Alexander Sinclair. His father was the fourth Sinclair of Lybster and the name Patrick was common

in the family, his grandfather bearing it, and his great grandmother was the daughter of Patrick Sinclair of Ulbster.

We have no knowledge of his youthful education but it must have been considerable as his papers and correspondence evince facility in expression, clear ideas and a good command of language.

In July, 1758, Patrick Sinclair purchased a commission as ensign—practically equivalent to 2nd Lieutenant, a grade not then existing—in the famous 42nd Highlanders, or Black Watch Regiment, but he may have had some previous service in some capacity as in a letter to Gen. Haldimand in August 1779, he refers to his 25 years service in the army, which if not a rhetorical exaggeration would imply that he had entered the service in 1754. At any rate he soon saw active service, as his regiment was sent to the West Indies in 1759, and he participated in January of that year in the attack and capture of Guadeloupe. Not long after with his regiment he went to New York and then to Oswego where they spent several months. In July 1760 he was promoted to lieutenant and in August his regiment joined the army which under the leadership of General Amherst invaded Canada and captured Montreal. Later it went to Staten Island, and in October, 1761, shortly before his regiment left for the West Indies he exchanged into the 15th Regiment of Foot. The reason for this exchange is not evident as the 15th Foot went to the West Indies the same Fall and in August 1763 came back to New York and then to

Canada. One Company however of the 15th Regiment remained in America and it is possible that this was Sinclair's Company, as there is some evidence that he was at Quebec for a year from October 1761, then for a time at New York, and again at Quebec. For a part of the time at least he was in Capt. Robert Stobo's Company. In the Spring of 1764 Sinclair must have been transferred to or connected with the Naval Department of the Lakes, as in a petition to the Earl of Hillsborough in 1769, he states that he "hath served his Majesty near six years last past on the Great Lakes in North America where he had the honor to command his Majesty's vessels on the Lakes Erie, Sinclair, Huron and Michigan," and the inscription on a silver bowl presented to him by the merchants of Detroit in 1767 refers to him as Captain Sinclair of the Naval Department.

The 15th Regiment of Foot was stationed at various posts in Canada, but no part of it as far west as Detroit, which was garrisoned mainly from the 60th Regiment during the entire period Sinclair was in charge, as he says, of the navigation on the lakes: his headquarters however being Detroit.

Sinclair's duties were general but important, to maintain and provision the boats, see to their arming and protection against the Indians who were numerous, and, for sometime after 1763, largely hostile to the English, and so dispose the shipping as to serve best the interest not only of the various garrisons, but also of the Indian traders and the merchants, who of necessity depended upon these boats for the

bringing in of their goods and the carrying out of their furs. The boats then in use consisted of canoes, batteaux, snows, sloops and schooners. The canoe was the famed birch bark canoe noted for its carrying capacity in proportion to its weight and admirably adapted to the carriage of persons but not freight. The batteau was a light boat worked with oars, long in proportion to its breadth and wider in the middle than at the ends. It was well adapted for carrying freight, and for some years after the English obtained possession of the lakes it was extensively used between the posts in transporting both freight and passengers. Of necessity the shore was closely followed both with batteau and canoe.

The snow was a type of vessel long since gone out of existence, with two ordinary masts and rigged much like a brig, but having in addition a small mast near the main mast to which the trysail was attached.

All the sailing vessels were of small burden. The Schooner Gladwin, famous for her successful attempt in bringing aid to the besieged Detroit garrison was of 80 tons burden. Up to 1780 the largest boat on the lakes was the brig Gage of 154 tons, built in 1774.

In the same petition referred to above Sinclair states that he is the only person on the lakes who has ever explored the navigation of the lakes for vessels of burden "by taking exact soundings of them and the rivers and Straits which join them with the bearings of the headlands, islands, bays, etc., etc."

The beginning of the siege of Detroit by Pontiac was signalized by the murder by the Indians on May 7th, 1763, of Capt. Robertson, Sir Robert Davers, six soldiers and a boat's crew of two sailors while engaged in taking soundings near the mouth of the "River Huron" as the account states it, now called St. Clair River, to see if the lakes and rivers were navigable for a schooner then lying at Detroit on her way to Mackinac.

As a means of facilitating his duties, especially in regard to the communications between Detroit and the upper lakes, Sinclair erected in 1764 a small fort just south of the mouth of Pine River in St. Clair County, the buildings comprising two barracks, one for sailors and one for soldiers, two block houses for cannon and small arms, and a wharf for drawing out and careening vessels, all enclosed within a stockade. This post, about midway between lakes Huron and St. Clair, enabled him to control the river as regards the Indians, and also furnished a place for trade with them. This establishment was ordered and approved by Col. Bradstreet who was in Detroit in August, 1764.

In connection with his duties while stationed on the Lakes he made a trip of exploration down in the Indiana Country along the Wabash river, thus acquiring considerable knowledge of the French settlements in that vicinity.

Sinclair seems on the whole to have got along with the Indians very satisfactorily, and to have obtained their respect and liking and to have es-

tablished a widespread reputation to that effect. He was not entirely free from troubles however, as in 1767, the Chippewas or Mississaguas murdered a servant of his near the foot of Lake Huron. The murderers were apprehended and sent to Albany for trial but were finally released to his indignation.

In 1767 the system of operating boats on the Lakes was changed and delivered over to private contractors, and Sinclair's duties and official position terminated but it required some time to close out his matters, and when in the early summer of 1768 his regiment returned to England he remained upon the Lakes, and did not return to England until the spring of the following year. That his conduct of affairs while in charge was acceptable to the class with whom he came most in contact outside of his government relations is proved by the presentation to him in 1767 of a silver bowl—still preserved in the family—with the following inscription engraved upon it: "In remembrance of the encouragement experienced upon all occasions by the merchants in the Indian countries from Capt. Patrick Sinclair of the Naval Department, not as a reward for his services, but a public testimony of their gratitude this is presented instead of a more adequate acknowledgment which his disinterested disposition renders impracticable. Dated the 23rd September, 1767." The merchants of Mackinac also gave him a testimonial.

Sinclair had erected the buildings and made the improvements at his fort mainly at his own expense, and in March, 1769, he applied to Gen. Gage then

commanding the British forces in America, to be reimbursed for his outlays—£200, but Gage replied that the Government had not directed the construction and therefore Sinclair could do with the improvements what he saw fit. Perhaps in anticipation of such result and as a measure of self protection Sinclair had obtained from the Indians a deed to a tract of land upon the St. Clair River, $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles along the river by the same in depth to include his improvements. This deed is dated July 27th, 1768, and was signed by Massigiash and Ottawa, chiefs of the Chippewa Nation, in the presence of 15 Indians of that Nation and of George Turnbull, Captain of the Second Battalion of the 60th Regiment, George Archbold, Lieutenant, and ensigns Robert Johnson and John Amiel of the same Regiment, also of John Lewis Gage, Ensign of the 31st Regiment, and Lieut. John Hay of the 60th Regiment, Commissary of Indian affairs. In the deed the land is described as being "on the Northwest side of the River *Huron*, between Lake Huron and Lake Sinclair, being one mile above the mouth of a small river commonly called Pine River and ending one mile and a half below the mouth of said Pine River." The consideration stated is "the love and regard we bear for our friend Lieut. Patrick Sinclair and for the love and esteem the whole of our said nation has for him for the many charitable acts he has done us, our wives and children."

The King of England in his proclamation of October 3rd 1763, establishing the province of Quebec, had

expressly prohibited the obtaining of deeds from the Indians except under special license, and through certain officials. This deed, therefore, although executed with considerable formality, and in the presence of the highest British Officials in the vicinity, did not operate to convey any legal title and this was recognized by Sinclair himself in 1774, in a petition to the government to be reimbursed for his expenditures on the property.

The property thus obtained was of sufficient size and quality to entitle him to consideration among the land owners of his native home, and he improved it by clearing, by setting out an orchard on the north side of Pine River, and by additional buildings. It included a considerable body of pine and it is a curious fact that this marked on the East side of Michigan the Southern line of the great pine section of the lower peninsula. During the period of his station at Detroit, Sinclair used the fort, buildings and pinery, but it is not known who looked after it during his absence from this locality after leaving in 1769 to 1779 when he arrived at Mackinac, but in 1780 Francis Bellecour, the British Indian Agent at Detroit, was in charge. He evidently was not giving satisfaction to the Indians in the vicinity, as in July of that year Maskeash, one of the Chiefs who signed the deed, with his wife and ten other Indians from along St. Clair River, went up on one of the government vessels, commanded by Alex Harrow, to Fort Mackinac to ask that Baptiste Point de (or du) Sable, be appointed to take charge of the property

in place of Bellecour. deSable was a free mulatto who had traded with the Indians at the lower end of Lake Michigan, and as he was friendly to the Americans had been captured in 1779 by a British force from Fort Mackinac on the ground of his being a sympathizer with the American Rebels, and taken to Mackinac and detained. By his conduct after his capture he commended himself to his captors and to Sinclair then Lieutenant Governor and as a result he was released and sent down to look after this property and trade with the Indians. He did not remain there long, however, but returned to Illinois and continued at Peoria and Chicago until his death in 1811.

Although not in chronological order the subsequent history of this tract may be here narrated.

In 1783 Lieut. Governor Sinclair was living on the Isle of Orleans awaiting a decision upon the allowance of his accounts. A young man by the name of Nicholas Boilvin who was a native of the parish of St. Nicholas near Quebec, decided to try his fortunes in the far west, and May 1st., 1783, Sinclair gave to him a power of attorney to take charge of his farm on Pine River, his "stock, houses, barns, orchards, gardens, timber and every other article thereto appertaining." The same instrument recommended Boilvin to the protection of the officers at Detroit, so that all other persons might be prevented from cutting timber or trading near the post to Boilvin's detriment.

Boilvin on reaching Detroit, decided to go still

farther west and September 20th, 1783, he assigned his power of attorney to David Ross and shortly after went to St. Louis, and became an Indian agent of the United States and later removed to Prairie du Chien, where he was for many years a person of some consequence.

In 1788, Sinclair's rights were sold at auction and bought by Meldrum & Park, a firm of merchants and Indian traders of Detroit who went into possession of the property, made improvements and erected two saw mills, and a grist mill.

In 1795, as the Indian deed to Sinclair had never been registered, but taken by him to England, finally finding its way to the Public Record office in London, they obtained another deed from twenty six Chippewa Chiefs, purporting to be in confirmation of the former deed to Sinclair, but the new deed conveyed a tract ten miles along St. Clair River by four miles in depth or about six times as much land. This seems to have been in accordance with the usual way of honesty and fairness with which the white man treated the Indian. This deed was not recognized by the United States as a conveyance of title, but the possessions taken under it enabled Meldrum & Park and their grantees to obtain patents from the United States in 1810 to nearly five thousand acres.

In 1768 or 9 Sinclair petitioned the Earl of Hillsborough, then Secretary for the Colonies, for the appointment of Superintendent of Navigation upon the Lakes, pointing out his experience, his successful

services and the great need of such an official to protect the interests of the government, but the petition was refused, much to Sinclair's disappointment.

It is not known exactly when he returned to England and his regiment, but sometime in the Spring of 1769 and was engaged in recruiting for upwards of a year.

In May 1771 he applied to the Earl of Hillsborough for the grant of a house at Detroit belonging to the Crown in lieu of his buildings at Pine River, the matter was referred to Gen. Gage, then at New York, who promised to look into the matter and see if that could be done without injury but apparently the inquiry was never made and nothing came of the petition.

He was promoted to Captain April 13, 1772, and the next year retired with the provision that he would not lose his rank if he rejoined the army. Upon his retirement Sinclair returned to his ancestral home at Lybster, but time moved slowly there to a man accustomed for years to the wilderness and freedom of the Great Lakes in America and to the power and influence which Sinclair had been wont to exercise and directly upon his retirement he began exerting influence to get back to this country. On June 1st 1773, Sir Charles Thompson who had been for 7 years the Colonel of the 15th Regiment, and who was an intimate personal friend of the King, wrote Lord Dartmouth in his behalf, recommending him as a proper person for appointment in Pennsylvania, the Jerseys, New York and the New England Pro-

vinces, but nothing came of it. The government had never recognized his title to his land in America, nor had it ever repaid his outlays upon it, and in December, 1774 he applied for payment not only of these charges, but also for £56 which he paid to the Indians in redemption of white captives. In the same account he includes £27 for his expenses caused by his being detained in the west when his regiment was sent to Europe and £70 for two servants killed by the Indians. In February, 1775, his same kind and influential friend wrote again to Lord Dartmouth recommending Captain Sinclair for employment in Canada. This time the fates were propitious and prompt, as on April 7th, 1775, he was commissioned by King George III, as Lieutenant Governor and Superintendent of the Post of Missillimakinac.

By the Proclamation of 1763 the Province of Quebec was established with such boundaries that practically all the Great Lake region lay outside, and therefore without any established form of government, which remained essentially military, without courts or ordinary civil officers. The Quebec Act, passed by Parliament and effective in October, 1774, greatly extended the limits of the Province so as to reach the Ohio on the South and the Mississippi on the west. By this Act a form of government by Governor and Council was provided and the old French laws recognized.

Although the act itself made no reference to or provision for the western posts, the King in April, 1775, recognized four western districts or posts, and

appointed as many Lieutenant Governors or Superintendents, one each to the posts of Detroit, Missilimakinac, St. Vincennes, and the Illinois. These appointees were respectively Henry Hamilton, Patrick Sinclair, Edward Abbott and Matthew Johnson. There was no attempt made to define the limits of each district, but ordinarily no question could arise over conflict of jurisdiction. There was in each case a fortified post, which formed the center of operations. There was, however, a clear distinction between the Post or District, and the fortified place; thus in the case of Sinclair, his seat of operations was Fort Mackinac, while his post was Missillimakinac, and extended to cover the territory of all the Indians who were wont to come to that point to trade.

In the commission appointing Sinclair Lieutenant Governor there was no definition of his powers but he was to hold the position with all its "rights, privileges, profits, perquisites and advantages during the King's pleasure." The incumbent, however, was required to obey such orders and directions as he might receive from time to time from the Captain General and Commander in Chief of Quebec.

As there was no statute or general regulation upon the subject, the relation of the Lieutenant Governor, a civil officer, to the military force stationed at his post was indefinite and at Detroit was productive of considerable trouble.

Anxious to arrive at his post of duty promptly, there being no direct shipping from Glasgow to Quebec,

Sinclair sailed for Baltimore, where he arrived July 26th, 1775, and at New York August 1st. His purpose then was to go up the Hudson to Albany, thence to Oswego, and from there by boat to Quebec, and he made all preparation to leave New York August 4th, but on that day the Provincial Congress of New York then in session, having learned the previous day of his presence in the city, and of his great influence with the Indians, thought it unwise to permit him to go to his post where he might prejudice his Indian friends against the Colonies, and took him in custody and sent him on parole to Nassau Island in Suffolk County, Long Island, where he remained until the following March, when upon his application to be permitted to retire to Europe, the Continental Congress granted his petition and he returned to England that summer.

It apparently was rather difficult to get passage back to America, as in May 1777 we find Lord George Germaine then Secretary of the Colonies granting Sinclair permission in response to request to come over in the packet Bristol rather than as "an unwelcome guest in a man-of-war."

He did not reach America until the fall of 1777, this time at Philadelphia where he went with letters to Sir William Howe who advised him that his best plan to reach his post of duty via Quebec was to go by way of the St. Lawrence River the following spring. Accordingly he spent the winter with Lord Howe and when the English fleet and forces left

for England in May 1778, Capt. Sinclair went as far as Halifax, where he was again compelled to wait until he could obtain transportation to Quebec.

Communications between Halifax and Quebec were infrequent and slow and it was not until June, 1779, that Capt. Sinclair arrived at Quebec and was ready to present himself and his commission to the Governor and receive his instructions and proceed to his post, although he had sent a communication to the Governor from Halifax in October of the year before.

At this time Sir Frederick Haldimand was Governor General. He was of Swiss birth, and after some years service in the Prussian army joined the British forces in 1754 and was rapidly promoted. He was an efficient officer and a good soldier, but his character and training both emphasized the military over the civil power. And on more than one occasion he received severe reprimands from the English government because of actions due to this feeling.

The officer then in command at Fort Mackinac was Maj. Arent Schuyler DePeyster who had been there for five years. He was a capable officer, quite influential with the Indians and tactful in his intercourse with others. He was gifted in a literary way, and although of American birth had strong English sympathies, serving in the English army during the Revolutionary War, and upon retirement from the army went to Dunfries, Scotland, his wife's native place, where he became a close friend of the Poet Burns. For some time De Peyster had been desirous of leaving Mackinac, giving as his reasons that his

health was poor and that his private affairs at New York—where his family had long been established—sadly needed his presence but his real reason was the distance of his post from civilization as no further complaints were heard from him after he was transferred to Detroit.

It is probable that Haldimand and Sinclair had met before. In 1760 Haldimand, as lieutenant Colonel, accompanied the British force from Oswego to Montreal and Sinclair's regiment the 15th Foot, was a part of the force. Although Sinclair arrived in Quebec early in June, 1779 and undoubtedly presented himself promptly with his commission and a letter from Germaine, which stated that as Lieutenant Governor he would have command over the military force stationed there, as well as civil authority, the Governor General who did not relish the idea of Sinclair's exercising military as well as civil powers at his post put him off on various pretences for over a month—in the meantime writing to DePeyster that he intended to delay Sinclair until the ships' arrival from England in mid-summer, hoping perhaps to receive by then some authority to reduce or negative the instructions in Lord Germaine's letter. The ships arrived, but nothing to favor his wishes: he thereupon wrote to England, commenting upon the union of the civil and military authority in one person but the reply received the following year made plain that the action of the government in this respect was fully considered and would not be altered.

In the meantime Haldimand issued a set of instruc-

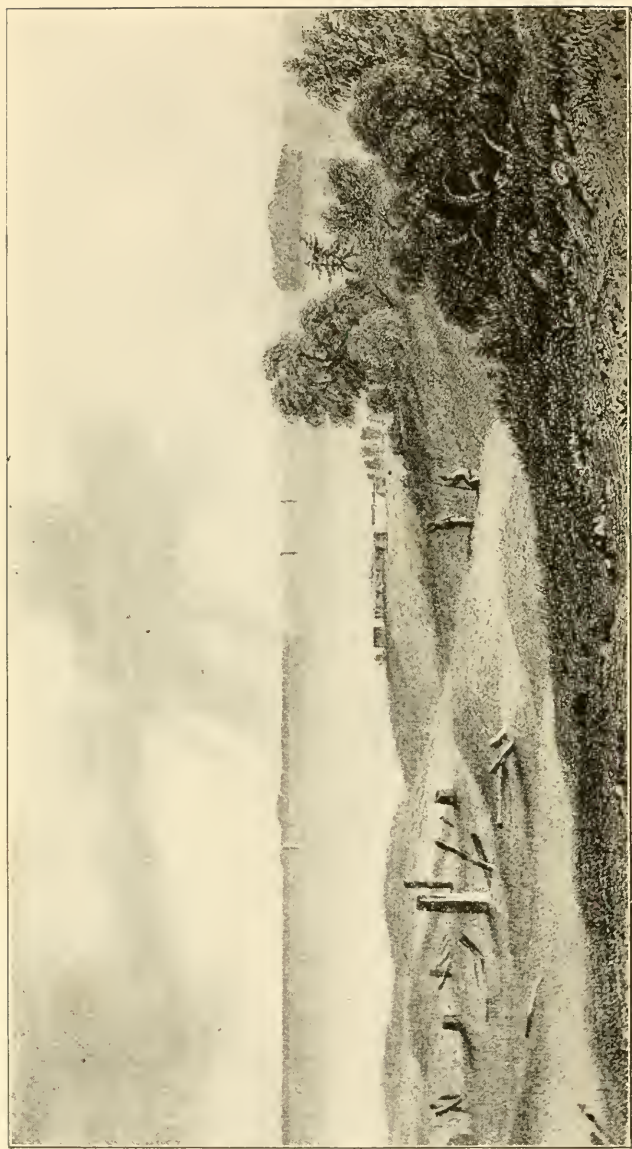
tions for Sinclair, in which, disobeying the express terms of Lord Germaine's letter, he authorized Sinclair to act as Commandant only until a senior officer of the garrison stationed there should arrive, and impressed upon him that only such senior officer had power over the troops to be sent beyond garrison limits, and in addition the perquisites attached to the commander of the post were to go to the officer.

Naturally such instructions proved very distasteful to Sinclair who at once addressed a spirited remonstrance to the Governor. After some vigorous correspondence, in which Sinclair proposed to return to England rather than occupy a position which might be humiliating, the matter was compromised; the instructions were somewhat modified, and it was represented to him that there was in fact no senior officer at the post and an early opportunity would be given to purchase a commission as officer which would entitle him to outrank anyone who would be sent to the garrison.

With these assurances he left Quebec the last of August 1779 for his post, and arrived at Fort Mackinac October 4th, 1779, probably by way of the Ottawa River, $4\frac{1}{2}$ years after the date of his commission. He had crossed the ocean three times and while until this date he had not been able to exercise any authority under his commission he had not neglected one important part of his duty, to draw his annual salary of £200.

Three days after his arrival, Major DePeyster left for Detroit, and Sinclair was free to examine

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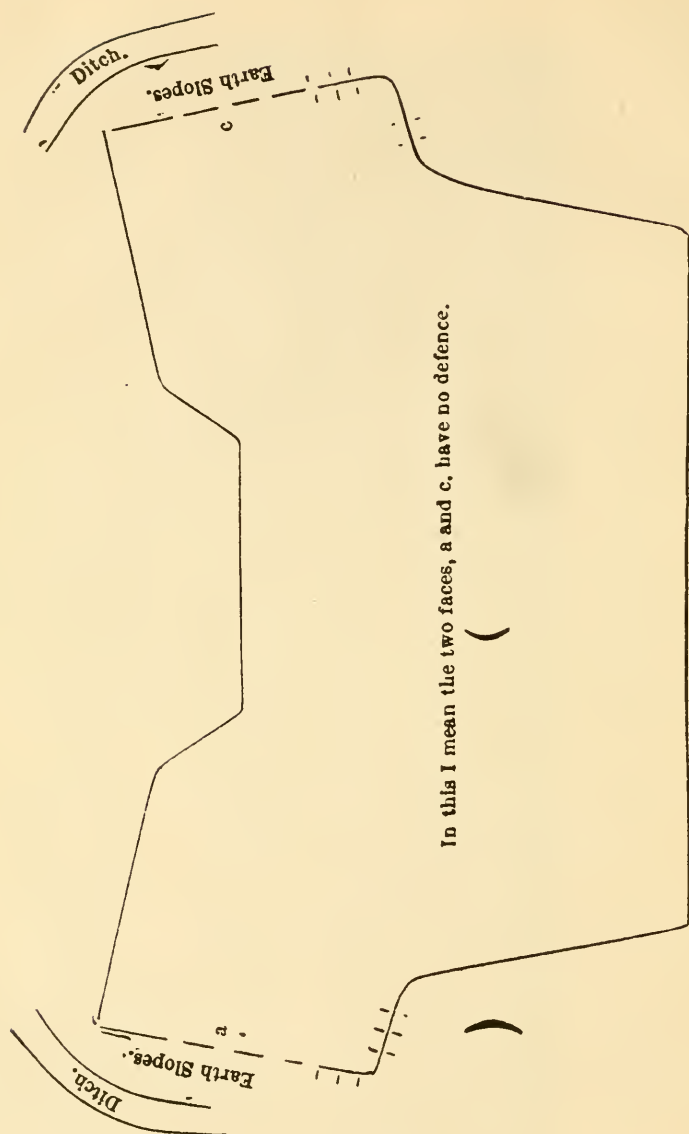


OLD FORT MICHILIMACKINAC ON THE SOUTH SIDE OF THE STRAITS
(From Williams' Early Mackinac, opposite p. 26)

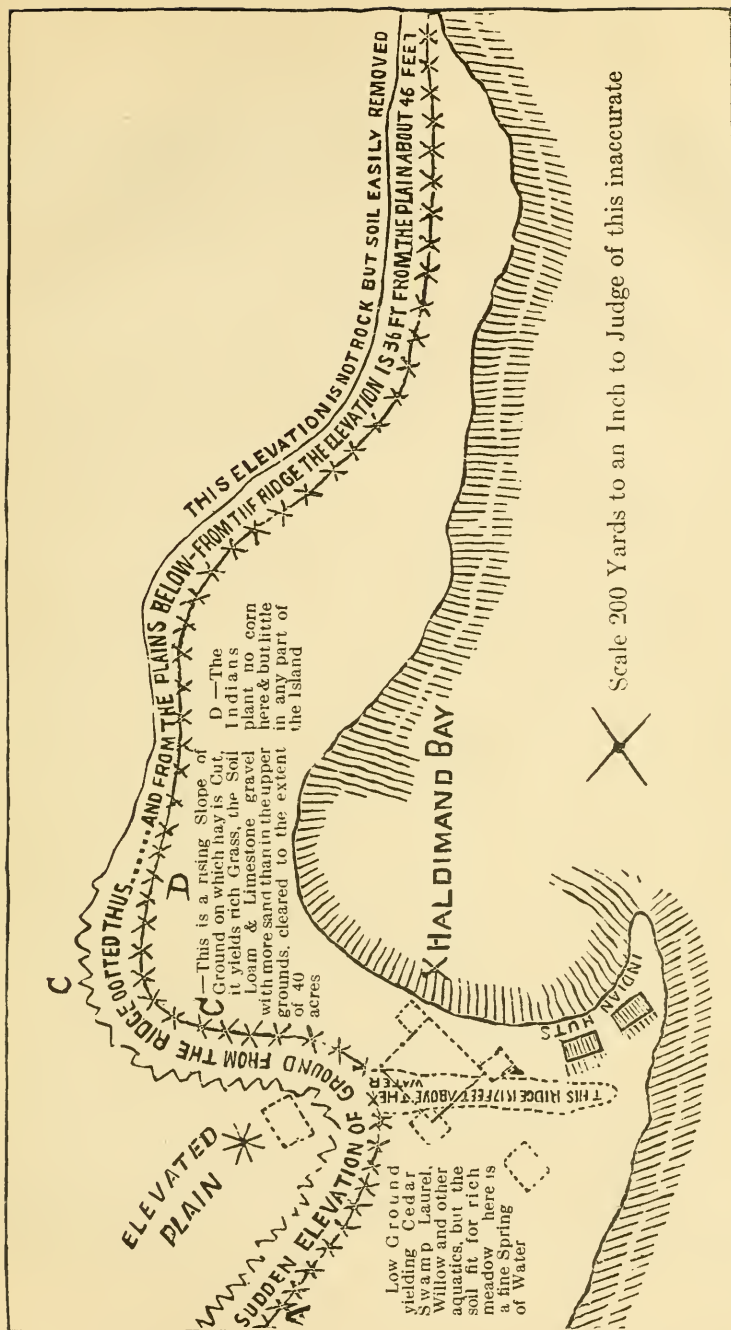
his empire. The fort was on the mainland on the south side of the strait, and practically in the same condition as it existed in 1763 at the time of its capture by the Indians. It enclosed about two acres and the ramparts consisted solely of pickets driven into the ground. It was on the sand and so near the shore that the waves in time of storm dashed over the pickets. The practiced eye of Capt. Sinclair at once noted its insecure condition, its inability to resist any attack but that of small arms, and that it could not afford protection to vessels. In a letter to Capt. Brehm, aide to Gov. Haldimand, written four days after his arrival he suggested the removal of the fort to the Island of Michilimackinac, and pointed out at some length the many advantages which the island possessed in the way of easy construction of a defensible fort, the protection of vessels, and good building material "but for God's sake be careful in the choice of an engineer and don't send up one of your paper engineers fond of fine regular polygons."

In another letter to Brehm a week later he returned to the subject and urged prompt action. "It is the most respectable situation I ever saw, besides convenient for the subsistence of a Garrison, the safety of troops, traders and commerce."

Without waiting for authority from the Governor which could not be expected to be received until the following Spring, Sinclair proceeded to set men at work on the island clearing, making shingles, pickets, etc., and by February had so much done



OUTLINE OF OLD FORT MICHLIMACKINAC
 (From a letter of Sinclair to Brehm, Mich. Pion. and Hist. Colls., IX, 529)



OUTLINE OF FORT MACKINAC AS PLANNED BY SINCLAIR

(Accompanying a letter from Sinclair to Brehm. See Mich. Pion. and Hist. Colls., IX, 523 and X, opposite p. 390)

that he set about moving the French Church over to the Island and persuaded the traders and Canadians—as the French were generally called—that the removal was not only desirable but certain.

In May 1780 came the consent of the Governor to the change with the information that he had so much confidence in the Lieut. Governor's engineering abilities that no other engineer would be sent. Sinclair soon found, however, that with the limited means at his command in masons and artificers it would not be possible to complete the new fort sufficiently to move into it during that season, and he accordingly took all steps to put the mainland fort into the best possible condition to repel attack which he feared might come from the "rebels"—friends and adherents of the U. S.—and their Indian friends.

In the meantime Sinclair had obtained the desired reinstatement in military rank so he was properly styled the Commandant—as well as Lieutenant Governor,—thus uniting the military and civil powers of the post. It so happened that Capt. George McDougall of the 84th Regiment, had been for some time anxious to sell out and retire on account of his health, but as he was an active and efficient officer, well liked by the Indians, the Governor was loath to permit him to go. However, in the Spring of 1780, on the representation of failing health, permission was granted him to sell out and Lieut. Patrick Sinclair became the purchaser and a Captain again in the British Army, his commission being dated from April 1, 1780.

Sinclair received notice of his appointment July 8, and it evidently was a source of much satisfaction to him as he signed his letters for a time "Patt. Sinclair, Capt. 84th Reg't & Lieut. Gov."

It was not long before an affair justified his insistence with Gov. Haldimand upon the propriety and necessity of the provisions in Lord Germaine's letter. Capt. Mompesson of the 8th Reg., then at Detroit, was ordered by Maj. DePeyster to take a part of his company to Mackinac to relieve a company of Grenadiers. Upon his arrival, Aug. 21st, 1780 he immediately refused to take orders from Sinclair and the next day issued a Regimental order that he expected obedience to his commands from the troops in the garrison. Both officers wrote at once to the Governor who immediately decided that Capt. Sinclair was in the right, that his former rank as Captain in the 15th Regiment had been preserved upon his leaving that regiment, and he therefore clearly outranked Capt. Mompesson. The Governor in his letter to Sinclair about the matter added that he had at length obtained his Majesty's decision upon the disputed rank of Lieutenant Governors of the posts, this decision was in fact merely a confirmation of Lord George Germaine's letter.

Another episode happened at this time not calculated to soothe a somewhat peppery disposition and one regardful of the dignity and authority of its owner. Capt. Alex Harrow of the Schooner *Welcome*, arrived July 29th, 1780, and assumed as superior in naval command to give an order to Capt.

McKay of the Felicity which had been plying chiefly between the post and the Island. (Captain Harrow was a Scotchman who came to the Great Lakes in 1776 as an officer in the naval department, and in 1794 settled in St. Clair County on a large tract of land lying a short distance above Algonac and upon a part of which descendants of his are now living.) The Lieutenant Governor resented this interference with his own authority, and as both men were tenacious of their dignity, it resulted in Harrow being taken from his vessel and imprisoned in the fort. After confinement of a month or two the authority of Sinclair was confirmed by the Governor, and Harrow through the good nature of Sinclair who though quick to anger was equally quick to relent, was released and reinstated in command of his vessel.

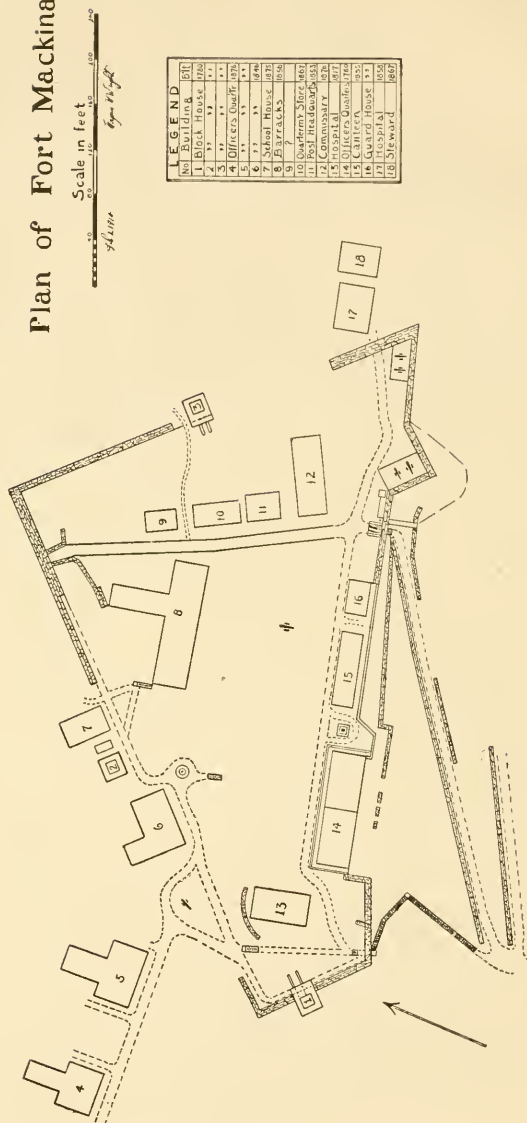
The command of a post so distant and isolated as that of Mackinac was a severe test of the qualities of promptness, decision, judgment and tact, and an early opportunity displayed Sinclair's possession of the first two qualities in ample quantity. After France embraced the cause of the United States she endeavored to get Spain to do the same, but the latter, though aiding the Americans in many ways, including the sale of a large quantity of gunpowder at New Orleans, made no formal declaration of war until May 8, 1779. Lord Germaine either devised or adopted a plan to drive the Spanish out of Louisiana and on June 17, 1779, wrote Gen. Haldimand, directing him in co-operation with Brig. Gen. Camp-

bell to attack New Orleans and the other Spanish posts on the Mississippi River.

Haldimand issued a circular letter to the Governors of all the Western posts giving general instructions. This letter after passing from Col. Bolton at Niagara to Maj. DePeyster at Detroit, was forwarded by the latter Jan. 22, 1780, to Sinclair at Mackinac. The day after its receipt Sinclair sent a war party to engage the Sioux Indians to proceed down the Mississippi River. He also ordered Mr. Hesse, a trader, but formerly in the army, to collect a force of Indians and supplies in Wisconsin for the same purpose. A few days later he dispatched a sergeant with Machiquawish, a noted Indian Chief, and his band. The combined force made an attack on St. Louis which was only partially successful, and the project as a whole was a failure, the result being to leave the district South of Lake Michigan and as far West as the Mississippi River in American control. Sinclair shows up, however, very favorably in the affair, and if the King had been as well served elsewhere the result might have been very different.

The removal to the Island fort was made in the summer of 1781, although the fort was not entirely completed. It contained four block houses, three of which built in 1780 are still standing; the fourth which stood near the southeast corner was later removed. The walls have since been widened and raised, and the roadway from the lower town brought nearer to the face of the hill and parallel to it, and lengthened so as to reduce the grade. The officers'

Plan of Fort Mackinac



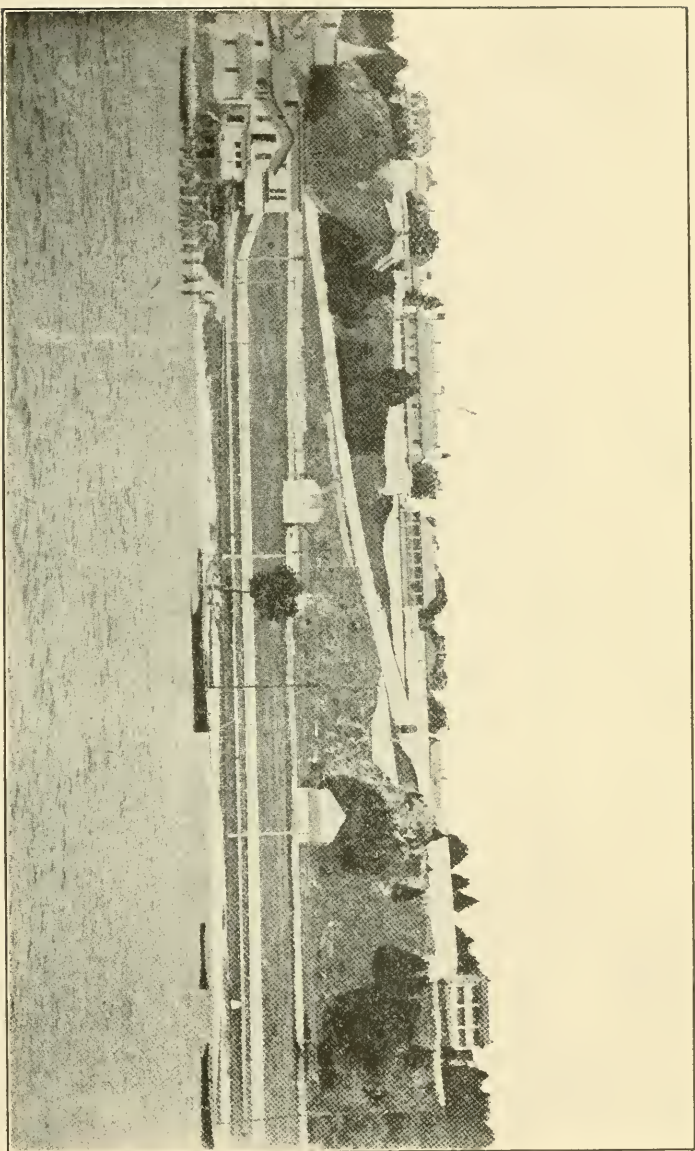
quarters stand where they were originally constructed and the guard house built in 1835 is on the site of the one built by Sinclair. The general plan however of the fort remains substantially the same today as when it was originally constructed 134 years ago, except that the North wall toward the West is brought in, thus contracting the enclosure by about one-fourth.

Sinclair proposed to call the new fort "Haldimand" after the Governor, but the latter decided that the fort should be called Fort "Makinac," and the post should be continued to be called Michilimackinac, thus indicating that the post, meaning the civil jurisdiction, was more extensive than the fort which included only the garrison limits. The Governor's spelling of the name of the fort was never carried out but the name of the post continued as long as the British retained control. When they left and the Americans took possession, the post, as such, ceased, and both island and fort took the same name, Mackinac.

Sinclair, as a means of propitiating the Indians and securing their approval of removal to the Island, had negotiated with some of the Chiefs for a deed which he finally obtained in May, 1781. By this deed five Chiefs of the Chippewa nation relinquished to Lieut. Gov. Sinclair for the behalf and use of the English King, the Island of Michilimackinac, and agreed to preserve in their village a belt of wampum 7 feet in length to perpetuate and be a lasting memorial of the transaction. The consideration was £5000 N. Y. currency (equal to \$12500). The deed

was signed with the totems of the Chiefs, also by Patt. Sinclair, Lt. Gov'r & Commandant, Capt. Mompesson, Lieut. Brooke and Ensign McDonall, and witnessed by six of the resident traders.

The work of completing the fort went on slowly as the Commandant could not get the necessary workmen. Maj. Depeyster at Detroit was not feeling very friendly to Sinclair and when requested to send artificers reported that he could not spare any, and in August, Brig. Gen. Powell was compelled to peremptorily order him to send up two carpenters. During the years of the construction of the fort an unusually large number of Indians came to Mackinac from all quarters to receive their annual presents from the British Government. Sioux, Menominies, Sacs, Foxes, Ottawas and Chippewas, Winebagoes and all other tribes between the Great Lakes and the Mississippi, and even beyond, had become accustomed to make an annual pilgrimage to Michilimackinac to meet the representative of their Great Father across the water and receive in return an outfit which would please their sense of display and enable them to support life until another season. The coming of the white man and the introduction of strong drink and of fire arms had completely revolutionized the status of the Indians. From an independent self supporting people procuring their spare and difficult livelihood by the exercise of natural talents heightened by ever present necessity, they had become dependent for clothing and means of obtaining food. No longer were their own developed



FORT MACKINAC

(From Williams' Early Mackinac, opposite p. 48)

weapons sufficient. They needed guns, powder and shot to kill the animals whose flesh gave them food and whose skins gave the furs the white man coveted and was willing to pay for.

The French had found it advantageous to give the Indians some presents to stimulate and maintain their friendship, but the English found it necessary to give far more. The French, by their willingness to live the life of the Indians, to intermarry with them, and by their understanding and appreciation of Indian nature, were naturally regarded as their friends, and in the long French and English war the sympathies of the Western Indians were with the former and Pontiac found it easy to obtain the adherence of the most of the tribes. When the English obtained possession of the western posts, they thought it wise to conciliate the Indians by presents, and as time went on the number of Indians who applied for gifts and the extent of their demands increased until it became appalling to the British authorities. An additional reason why, during the period of Gov. Sinclair's station at Mackinac a larger amount of presents was needed than in ordinary times was that owing to the Revolutionary War the English feared—and with good reason—that the French were in the main, friendly to the Americans, and would use their influence with the Indians to turn the latter against the English, and if this should happen all the western posts would inevitably fall into the hands of the Americans.

The three posts on the lakes to which the Indians

resorted in large numbers for supplies were Niagara, Detroit and Michilimackinac. One of the articles most in demand was rum, and as an illustration, it appears that there was consumed during the year from June 1780 to June 1781, at the three posts 19386 gallons of this article euphemistically called "milk" at the Indian pow wows and this does not include the large amount used and furnished by the traders.

The class of other articles sent by the Government as presents can be seen from the return showing that in 1781 there was sent to Lieut. Gov. Sinclair for Indian presents, 991 pairs of blankets, mostly $2\frac{1}{2}$ and 3 point, 102 dozen calico shirts, and 50 doz. linen ones, laced hats, feathers, looking glasses, knives, tomahawks, medals, needles and thread, axes, razors, brass and copper kettles, tobacco, powder, shot and guns, and a host of other minor articles.

It happened not infrequently that the supply of goods furnished by the government became low, or was very late in arriving at the post and as the presents must be made when the Indians were there, the officers at the posts had been in the habit of buying from the traders such articles as they thought to be absolutely necessary and in consequence they often were compelled to pay high prices. These purchases as well as all other outlays were met by drafts drawn by the Lieut. Governor upon the Governor General.

In order to prevent a further continuance of this practice and reduce if possible the great and increasing

expenses of the Western posts, on June 22nd, 1781, Gov. Haldimand issued orders that the officers at Niagara, Detroit and Michilimackinac should, on no account whatever, after receipt of the order, purchase liquors or any other articles whatever for the use of the Indians from the Traders, and that no circumstances whatever would be admitted a reason for not complying with the order.

Lieut. Gov. Sinclair did not observe this order very closely, evidently believing that this order was only intended for ordinary occasions, and that as he was on the ground he was entitled to use his judgment even if it resulted in violating orders made at a great distance.

During the years 1780, 1781, 1782 the new fort was under construction, and in 1781 Sinclair drew on the Governor General drafts to the amount of £43,000, N. Y. cy., for the engineering works and £65,000 for the Indian Department. This was an increase over the preceding year of £18,000 in the latter and nearly £35,000 in the former, which, however, was probably not unexpected as much more work was done on the new fort in 1781 than in 1780. In 1782 the Lieut. Governor drew for immense sums in both departments; in January one draft went forward for over £43,000 to be charged against the fort building, and to this no objection seems to have been made. On the same day, however, he drew £11,450 on account of Indian expenditures, and when this draft was presented to Haldimand he refused to accept it, and referred the accounts to Mr. Goddard,

general storekeeper and inspector of Indian presents, with instructions to charge out all articles he might consider presents to the Indians. He later requested advice from his Attorney General upon the question whether he could legally pay part of the account, without acknowledging the whole. Apparently he was advised that he might safely pay part as he did pay over £9000.

In April Sinclair drew drafts to the amount of £14,500 of which £9,500 was on account of the fort and was paid, and £5,000 for Indian expenditures which was paid in part. In July he drew for over £60,000 of which £40,000 was for the Indian department and the remainder for the Fort construction, about one-half of these drafts were accepted and the others refused and protested. Although the Commandant at Detroit was at the same time also drawing heavily, in 1781, £162,000 and in 1782, £66,000 nearly all of which was on Indian account—none of his bills were refused.

In August, 1782, Haldimand alarmed at these enormous expenditures which were affecting his own standing with the authorities in London appointed Lieut. Col. Henry Hope, Sir John Johnson, Supt. of Indian affairs, and James S. Goddard, to go to Mackinac and examine into the situation. They arrived September 15th and found a number of irregularities. There evidently had been looseness and carelessness in the keeping and checking of accounts, and the instructions of Gov. Haldimand had not been followed with regard to the purchase of articles from,

the traders. One of the perquisites which had been enjoyed and which though profitable to the Lieut. Governor, was detrimental to the public interests, was the reception by that official of presents from the Indians, generally in the nature of furs which naturally called for increased presents to the Indians, paid for by the Government. It is apparent however, that Sinclair's actions had some justification. Supplies ordered by him had not been sent, or were damaged in transit, or were so greatly delayed as not to arrive in time for distribution to the Indians, and the Commandant was obliged to choose between disappointing and alienating the Indians—a consequence of much importance until the Revolutionary War was ended—or purchase goods from the traders.

Most of these drafts which were objected to were drawn in favor of George McBeath to be used by him in the payment of the various traders who had furnished articles. McBeath had been sent up by Haldimand for the very purpose of taking charge of these expenditures and evidently thought them proper and necessary.

A few days after the arrival of the investigating Board, Sinclair turned over the command of the post to Capt. Robertson, the next ranking officer of the garrison, and left for Quebec arriving in October. The fort was not yet entirely completed. A careful survey made at the time by an engineer indicated the extent of the work done, and estimated that with 100 laborers and the necessary artificers the fort could be put into a safe condition in about two months. As

nearly \$300,000 had then been spent upon its construction without serious objection by the English authorities it may be easily conceived that they regarded the post as of high importance.

November 1st, Sinclair applied to Governor Haldimand for permission to go to Great Britain, which was refused on the ground that he was needed for the examination of his accounts. He then took up his residence on the Isle of Orleans, awaiting action on this matter, and there he remained until the fall of 1784, when he finally obtained the desired permission and left for England.

In the meantime Haldimand wrote in October 1782 to the English Treasury stating what he had done and that he would investigate and report. In November, he followed this by an explanation of his reasons which were in the main that Sinclair had acted contrary to the order of June, 1781 in buying Indian presents from the traders. He also promised to have the matter carefully looked into. A year went by without any action whatever and in October, 1783, Haldimand wrote the Treasury that he was waiting with great impatience for instructions. To this the Lords of the Treasury replied that he had failed to give them the information which he had promised, and which they needed before giving full instructions. In January, 1784, the Treasury received remonstrances from the merchants whose bills were unpaid, and they wrote Haldimand that such parts of the bills as represented articles furnished and labor performed should be paid for at

the usual rates. In July, 1784, Haldimand wrote that he had offered £22,000 upon bills drawn for £57,000, and that his offer had been refused and he had been threatened with prosecution by the claimants.

In the meantime Sinclair was eating out his heart on the Isle of Orleans. Prevented from going to England and meeting his family and friends, feeling the hostility of the Governor General, receiving the frequent importunities of the unfortunate traders, who had parted with their goods, but had not received their money, it is not to be wondered at that he fell into a state of deep and settled melancholy, and that even to his best friends his faculties began to seem impaired. Representations were made to the Governor General and in August, 1784 he was allowed to return to England in company with Capt. Erskine Hope and his wife who was a connection of Sinclair. The trip and his surroundings and his friends and relatives in Scotland where he at once repaired upon his arrival in England restored his health. In November Haldimand himself left Canada for England, arriving at London in January 1785. As soon as Sinclair heard of this he left at once for London determined to have his affairs settled, and arrived there February 28, 1785. He was delayed in meeting Haldimand however, by being arrested by some of the holders of the protested Mackinac bills and thrown into Newgate prison, from which he was released on March 17th by his paying the bills. He immediately demanded of Haldimand that the latter

repay the amount at once, or he would apply for a Court Martial. Apparently neither action was taken but early in April Haldimand was sued for £50,000 and he at once called upon the Government to defend him. In the following year the action was dismissed, and the claimants appealed to Government for their pay.

The result of this application is unknown but the standing of Sinclair with the English authorities does not seem to have been impaired by all these proceedings. While at Mackinac he had advanced in military rank, having become a Major in 1782. The next year his regiment, the 84th was disbanded. His absence from his post as Lieut. Governor did not affect his title or his salary except the allowance which he drew as commanding officer. In August 1784, the Gov. General was careful to impress upon Capt. Robertson, then commanding at Mackinac, that his authority was merely in the absence of the Lieut. Governor.

In October, 1793, Sinclair was made a Colonel, The post of Michilimackinac was transferred in June 1796, to the Americans, and although Sinclair had not set foot in it since he left in August, 1782, he had continued to draw his yearly salary of £200 with great regularity. According to modern ideas this would have been an unjustifiable sinecure, but that was an age of sinecures and it was acknowledged that an office was a vested right of which no possessor should be deprived without the payment of compensation. Accordingly, it is not surprising to find

that in April, 1797, Col. Sinclair, then in London, petitioned the Duke of Portland, Secretary of State, that as he had been at great pains in fortifying and defending the post of Michilimackinac, and his Majesty had found it expedient to give it up to the United States he flattered himself that this action would not be prejudicial to him and that his salary might be transferred to the general establishment. This petition apparently seemed reasonable and his salary continued during the remainder of his life.

Not long after he was retired on half pay and withdrew to Lybster where he spent the remainder of his days.

Being still in line for promotion he was made a Major General September 25th, 1803 and he was made Lieut. General, July 25th, 1810, and at his death, which occurred January 31st, 1820, at the age of 84, he was the oldest officer of his rank in the British army.

From a consideration of all the evidence now available in the matter of the protested bills Sinclair was unfairly treated. Haldimand, although a good soldier, was a stubborn opinionated man whose training as a soldier inclined him to be overbearing and impatient of anything except the most exact obedience to his orders. In the face of the King's commission to Sinclair with the accompanying letter of Lord George Germaine, which made the Lieut. Governor the Commandant entitling him to outrank any officer under a Brigadier General, he refused to recognize any military authority in the position. Although

admitting the great importance of placating the Western Indians, and having himself no personal knowledge of the difficulties of the situation, he thought his orders issued from a thousand miles away should be implicitly obeyed.

It is clear that Sinclair did not understand until the Board put in its appearance at Mackinac that he was doing anything more than the necessities of the situation required, in view of the fact that the government agencies were often so dilatory and neglectful as to leave the far distant post short or entirely lacking, and from his reply to Haldimand's letter of June, 1781, it is apparent that he understood his position as Lieut. Governor gave him some discretion and this position was never contradicted by Haldimand. His good faith is manifest all through, and even if Haldimand were justified in claiming that Sinclair had acted in contravention of his orders, that furnished no excuse for not paying the traders who had in good faith furnished articles actually used by the government and ordered by a representative they had no reason to suspect.

It seems probable that in the end the government paid the bills, as in 1786 the treasury at London called on Haldimand to furnish information why the bills had been protested, and to explain why he had continued McBeath at Mackinac in connection with Indian disbursements after he had repudiated his actions in connection with Sinclair.

Sinclair married Catherine Stuart of Invernesshire and had four sons and one daughter. Three sons

died unmarried, and one married but left two daughters who never married. His only lineal descendants are through the children of his daughter Susan who married David Laing, surgeon, of Thurso.

A full length silhouette of General Sinclair taken after he had retired from the army shows a large handsome man of imposing presence. Family tradition depicts him as an impulsive warm hearted as well as warm tempered individual, quick to resent and to punish, and equally quick to forgive, kindly and generous to dependents, philanthropic and helpful to the needy and improvident. He lived to the good old age of 84 and his thoughts must frequently have gone back to this Inland Empire in which nearly a decade of his life was spent, and in which he had wielded a wide influence, and had erected a monument still enduring. His name which was so closely connected with the early history of Michigan should be perpetuated and both Mackinac and St. Clair County should mark by proper memorials the name of Sinclair as a most important one in their rolls of historic characters.





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